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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KPAL](#) [EAID](#) [IS](#) [RS](#)  
SUBJECT: ABBAS WINS MOSCOW'S SUPPORT

Classified By: CDA Daniel A. Russell. Reasons 1.4 (B/D).

¶1. (C) Summary. Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas concluded a three-day visit to Moscow with a July 31 meeting with President Putin, who assured Abbas that the GOR would support him as the legitimate leader of the Palestinian people. Abbas also met with FM Lavrov and First DFM Denisov. In the wake of the visit, MFA officials termed the GOR's "downgrading" ties with Hamas a "change in accent" rather than a fundamental policy change, while affirming that the GOR's main goal remained Palestinian unity and the transformation of Hamas through dialogue. End summary.

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Keeping Options Open  
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¶2. (C) MFA Director for Israeli and Palestine Affairs Vladimir Baybakov told us August 1 that the Abbas visit, originally planned for June 19-21, but delayed because of the Gaza crisis, had aimed to capitalize on the new momentum in the Middle East. Abbas used the visit to "share notes" with the GOR on recent events, including Secretary Rice's visit to the region. On July 31, First DFM Andrey Denisov told a group of journalists that the GOR had downgraded ties with Hamas. Baybakov explained that the GOR position to retain contacts with Hamas remains; Moscow continues to believe that all routes to Palestinian unity need to be explored. The GOR will adhere to this principle even when it believes that Hamas behavior in the Gaza Strip has been "mistaken," Baybakov added. "We know they are not good guys, but we need to invite them to be part of the system," he said.

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What was on the Table  
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¶3. (C) According to Baybakov, the key issues Abbas discussed were:

-- the political situation in the region: Although Abbas maintained that dialogue with Hamas is possible only after the pre-"coup" circumstances have been restored, the GOR insisted on "stabilization through dialogue" with all parties, including Hamas. In that vein, Baybakov noted, FM Lavrov had a phone conversation with Hamas leader Khaled Mashaal one week before Abbas's arrival. Mashaal "pleasantly surprised" Lavrov by "recognizing Abbas as the Palestinian leader."

-- the U.S.-proposed international conference: Like Abbas, the GOR supports the idea but would like to see concrete goals elaborated.

-- GOR assistance to the Palestinian National Authorities (PNA): The GOR plans to send 50 armored personnel vehicles on the condition that they not be used in the internal Palestinian conflict. The two parties also discussed two

helicopters for Palestinians leaders and other additional equipment and humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip to be supplied through international organizations.

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 Hamas's Turn to Moscow?  
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14. (C) There are no plans for a Hamas visit to Moscow, said Baybakov, echoing what First DFM Denisov told journalists after the Putin - Abbas meeting. The GOR will deal with Hamas at the Lavrov level, and Putin will not meet with Hamas representatives. The GOR will provide "concrete" support to Abbas while keeping its channel of communication with Hamas open.

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15. (C) Mindful of Syria and Iran's lobbying for Moscow's continued engagement with Hamas, Abbas attempted to tip Moscow's favor scale toward him. He seems to have achieved what he wanted. Russia's renewed self-confidence and desire to play a role in all major international issues will continue to fuel its "balancing act" between the Palestinian Authority and Hamas.

RUSSELL